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UNHCR'S EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

1. UNHCR has long considered evaluation to be an important management tool that can lead to organizational change and learning. Despite its widely recognized importance, however, competing demands for scarce resources have in recent years led to a gradual decrease in the resources committed to this important function. Encouraged by a number of Governments, UNHCR has begun to search for new ways of strengthening both evaluation and policy analysis.

2. As a first step, the Canadian Government provided funds under its management trust fund to undertake a review of all aspects of UNHCR's evaluation system. Although the review made many positive comments about the quality of evaluation work at the central level, particularly its low cost and high output relative to its limited staff, the review was nonetheless critical of UNHCR's commitment to the function. The report suggested new systems and approaches, but more than anything suggested that the staff and financial resources committed to evaluation should be increased.

3. The review has led to a number of significant changes in evaluation, which has been separated from the inspection function. In addition, greater emphasis has been placed on policy analysis and a wider distribution of reports so that partners, who can make use of the analysis contained in the reports, will now have greater access to the work.

4. The review's recommendation, combined with the decentralization efforts underway and the development of UNHCR's new Operational Management System (OMS), are leading to far greater attention being given to self-evaluation. It is expected that this new emphasis will help create an organizational culture where programme managers see evaluation as one of their core responsibilities. The enhancement of evaluation also foresees, *inter alia*, an enhanced consultant roster and the development of new dissemination and feedback strategies.

5. In-depth evaluations carried out over the past year have focused on major activities in large operations, analysis of regional strategies and thematic issues. A brief summary of this work and the follow-up activities is provided below.

I. REVIEW OF THE UNHCR HOUSING PROGRAMME IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

6. UNHCR's Housing Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina constitutes the most significant housing programme ever undertaken by UNHCR, as well as the organization's largest reintegration effort. The programme has also been a key component of UNHCR's strategy for return following the Dayton Peace agreement. For these and many other reasons, an evaluation of the programme was carried out in 1998 aimed at improving the programme and learning lessons for future housing activities.

7. The review found that the House Repair Programme has played a role in the decision made by many persons to return home, and has helped them reestablish themselves once back. The programme also offered many other benefits, such as serving as an instrument of protection and providing some psychological reassurance to returnees, not to mention its value as a lever in the implementation of the Dayton accords. Despite the programme's accomplishments, it nonetheless had fallen short of expectations as an inducement to return. Furthermore, it was often plagued by low occupancy rates and other programme problems, particularly in its early stages.

8. Follow-up on the report's recommendations was immediate, beginning while the report was still in draft. The report was reviewed extensively by UNHCR staff involved in the programme and meetings were held to rethink existing efforts. The review has been of particular value in ensuring that the same mistakes are not repeated in Kosovo, where new programmes will draw extensively from the suggestions and lessons of the evaluation.

9. It is evident that many of the evaluation's findings are relevant to housing and reintegration efforts in other regions, as well as many other complex activities. Consequently, the evaluation was sent to all UNHCR staff who are engaged in housing programmes or are actively considering them.

10. At the request of the Assistant High Commissioner, a policy framework for housing activities is being developed to provide guidance on when and how UNHCR should become engaged in such efforts, and how to plan, organize and carry out housing programmes based on the experience and lessons that have been accumulated.

II. REVIEW OF PROBLEMS OF ACCESS TO LAND AND ITS OWNERSHIP IN REPATRIATION OPERATIONS

11. During the past few years, the problem of access to agricultural land for rural returnees has been one of the most difficult issues facing UNHCR in its efforts to organize the repatriation of refugees to their war-torn countries of origin. In many instances, the welfare and reintegration of returnees and indeed the whole process of national reconciliation hinges on this critical issue.

12. UNHCR staff involved in planning and implementing repatriation operations often encounter a wide variety of obstacles concerning access to land. Adequate data on prevailing conditions and land ownership systems in the countries concerned is often lacking. In most instances, it is not easy to ascertain the intentions of the governmental authorities regarding land-use, agricultural and development policies. Situations in which there has been recent conflict only add to the extreme complexity of the issue.

13. Until now there has been very little guidance available as to how to proceed. The evaluation therefore sought to identify the typical obstacles to land access for returnees, whether they be physical, legal, political or

economic. The study analysed different land ownership systems in various parts of the world, as well as the main international legal instruments relating to property ownership. The evaluation also drew on the experience gained by UNHCR staff in a variety of situations over the past few years, particularly in major repatriation movements to Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mozambique.

14. The report has been widely disseminated in all countries and regions where repatriation movements are taking place, and has provided useful guidance and insight to staff involved in these operations. In addition, it has been used in UNHCR training and regional workshops dealing with this issue.

III. REVIEW OF UNHCR'S STRATEGY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

15. Following an evaluation of UNHCR's strategy in Europe carried out in 1992, the Bureau for Europe has attempted to implement a strategy whereby offices in Europe move away from individual casework and place greater emphasis on advocacy, public awareness, training and network building.

16. A follow-up review was carried out six years later to determine the extent to which the strategy had been implemented, as well as to identify particularly successful approaches that had been adopted in implementing the agreed strategy. The review also examined the constraints and obstacles encountered, and identified the lessons learned since the strategy was put into effect.

17. The review found that the "reprioritization" exercise of 1992 has given rise to a generally positive change in the emphasis of UNHCR's work in the European Union. As a result, UNHCR has gained a more influential position in the countries concerned. Although a number of offices could do more, the review found that considerable progress has been made in reducing the time spent on individual casework. The review also noted a number of areas where efforts could be strengthened.

18. The Senior Management Committee endorsed the evaluation's findings and directed the Bureau to follow up on the report's recommendations at a special meeting of European Representatives. These efforts are continuing, but in general, the extent to which the findings of the two evaluations have been implemented can be considered satisfactory.

IV REVIEW OF THE MALI/NIGER REPATRIATION OPERATION

19. The importance of improving emergency response through learning tools such as evaluations has been repeatedly emphasized in UNHCR. To ensure that learning through such exercises is common practice, UNHCR's Emergency Preparedness and Response Section (EPRS) has begun to systematically request evaluations of key emergency operations. Through these efforts, UNHCR expects to develop a series of practical case studies that will ensure that the many lessons learned in new operations will not be lost.

20. The first evaluation carried out in response to an EPRS request analysed the many issues and lessons that arose from the Mali/Niger repatriation and reintegration operation. The shortcomings of the operation's early stages provided many lessons. The difficulties experienced during this period were generally not attributed to policy weaknesses, but rather implementation problems of a kind UNHCR has often had to face in the past, including shortages of staff, planning problems, lack of effective cross-border cooperation and delays in the arrival of essential equipment.

21. The evaluation identified a number of areas that should be addressed. It was suggested that all major operations have a Headquarters task force which should ensure adequate coordination between offices in the region. Such operations should also deploy sufficient experienced staff and new staff who have received induction training, along with technical staff suited for the requirements. In addition, the evaluation pointed out the need to develop suitable registration systems along with regional communication networks. Lastly, in the transition from relief to development the study suggested there is a need when phasing out to constitute a record of work completed, and to present outstanding needs to the Government, donors and development agencies.

22. As part of the follow-up process set in motion by the Assistant High Commissioner, EPRS is now designing a workshop and training course that will draw on the evaluation. Repatriation and rehabilitation guidelines are also being reviewed by EPRS and the Department of Operations' Reintegration Section to ensure they take account of the many lessons and best practices identified during the evaluation. To ensure the experience gained is shared among operations, all offices involved in repatriation and reintegration programmes are being requested to analyse and incorporate lessons from the evaluation in their operations.

V. REVIEW OF UNHCR'S REHABILITATION ACTIVITIES IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION OF AFRICA

23. In the aftermath of the refugee emergency in the Great Lakes region of Africa, UNHCR launched major rehabilitation activities in the refugee-impacted areas of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Republic of Tanzania. In an effort to examine their initial results, and to document the experience and lessons learned from these efforts, UNHCR's Senior Management Committee requested an evaluation of rehabilitation activities in the region.

24. The experience in the Great Lakes region of Africa provided many lessons for UNHCR. In particular, the report noted that when UNHCR seeks to protect refugees in situations of tension or internal strife, rehabilitation programmes can be used to introduce an element of stability. Furthermore, the presence of field staff engaged in these activities has contributed to the protection of refugees.

25. The evaluation also concluded that the limited possibilities to interface with development programmes in post-conflict situations raise concerns regarding the sustainability of UNHCR's input. Many UNHCR rehabilitation projects would have benefited substantially from linkages with larger strategies and longer-term programmes. With such linkages UNHCR could subordinate its own efforts to those orchestrated by relevant ministries and agencies with an extended presence in the targeted regions. The evaluation, therefore, concluded that every effort must be made to create such linkages at the earliest possible moment.

26. The study also emphasized that UNHCR's short-term project implementation procedures are not well adapted to development norms which require longer time-frames and more development expertise in planning and disbursing funds. Consequently, the evaluation suggested that whenever possible, UNHCR's rehabilitation activities should be part of a comprehensive strategy where the Office's role would be limited in time, after which, development agencies would be expected to take the lead. In situations where UNHCR is obliged to retain the lead role, the time-frames for many rehabilitation projects may have to be extended to permit detailed planning and to devise viable implementing arrangements. This might mean replacing Quick Impact Projects

with longer-term commitments, which could be funded under a trust fund. Lastly, the evaluation noted that timing the handover is vital. If the process is delayed until plans are made for a phase out, it will be difficult to convince sister agencies to take on the responsibility for UNHCR-initiated activities.

27. Following a discussion of the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation at a meeting of the Department of Operations, the Assistant High Commissioner directed the Division of Operational Support to take the lead in preparing policy guidelines regarding rehabilitation. The policy guidelines are expected to outline the situations and context in which the Office would become engaged in such efforts and, to the extent possible, present a framework regarding the nature and scope of involvement. The Assistant High Commissioner also requested the Department of Operations to prepare implementation guidance for UNHCR staff and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which take into account the lessons and experience UNHCR has acquired to date. In addition, the report was shared with staff engaged in rehabilitation programmes in other regions. These staff were requested to incorporate lessons from the evaluation in their own programmes.

VI. A SURVEY OF COMPLIANCE WITH UNHCR'S POLICIES ON REFUGEE WOMEN, CHILDREN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

28. Compliance with priority policies on refugee women and children, and environmental affairs has been an ongoing concern in UNHCR for some time. Although considerable progress has been made in these areas, those responsible for the implementation of the policies continue to identify important shortcomings. In order to assess the organization's efforts to implement these priority policies, a Survey of Compliance with UNHCR's Policies on Refugee Women, Children and the Environment was undertaken by UNHCR's Evaluation Unit.

29. The summary concluded that although attention has been increasingly focused on these policies, compliance has not yet reached the levels desired. To initiate immediate follow-up, the Assistant High Commissioner first ensured that the report was shared with all UNHCR staff. The implementation of the policies was subsequently discussed by UNHCR's Senior Management Committee and a half day meeting on the subject was organized by the Department of Operations in order to identify concrete steps staff could take to ensure implementation. In brief, the following measures were agreed:

(a) UNHCR would integrate gender equity analysis and programming for the rights of children into the Country Reports and Operations Plan (CROP) exercise;
(b) The Bureaux would define specific indicators for operations aimed at monitoring progress in mainstreaming gender equality and addressing the needs of refugee children;
(c) Accountability for addressing these issues would be included in the Career Management System (CMS) performance evaluation of all managers;
(d) Division of Operational Support would mainstream child policy priorities and gender equity analysis into all its functions;
(e) UNHCR's Headquarters bureaux and field staff would collaborate closely to identify gaps and develop appropriate response and measurable indicators;
(f) Policies and guidelines would be clarified and summarized to facilitate understanding and promote implementation;
(g) UNHCR's field and Headquarters' staff would commence with the identification and drafting of best practices; and
(h) The Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women would support an expansion of the gender network at Headquarters.

Lastly, there was an agreement that for the remainder of 1999 a major effort would be made to strengthen UNHCR's response to these critical issues.

VII. A REVIEW OF UNHCR STAFF TRAINING

30. UNHCR's staff training now permeates almost every facet of UNHCR's activities worldwide. UNHCR spends more than $ 5 million annually on training all categories of staff in a wide variety of subjects. The areas in which training is carried out range from the traditional refugee protection and programme management areas to such skills as communication, negotiations, computer literacy and techniques to manage and implement change. The volume of training measured in numbers of person-days has risen sharply over the past few years. Training now includes more than 8,000 participants in one or more, sometimes several, training events a year, organized by 17 different UNHCR "training providers".

31. The volume and diversity of training programmes which have been developed in UNHCR over the past 12 years is impressive. Nevertheless, there has been a growing sense that training could be usefully reviewed in order to assess whether the present organization and direction of training in UNHCR are able to advance UNHCR's strategic and operational goals effectively. Members of UNHCR's Senior Management Committee were eager to determine whether current efforts are well suited to UNHCR's new organizational structure and the recently introduced Career Management System.

32. Among its principal findings, the evaluation concluded that a reliance on autonomous training providers has offered many benefits, but has also resulted in an increasingly fragmented training programme which needs to be refocused on overall organizational goals. The review called for training to be better integrated into a Human Resource strategy and suggested that UNHCR take greater advantage of new approaches to non-formal learning.

33. Although the report had just been distributed as UNHCR's annual evaluation report was being finalized, the Office's Staff Development Section had already begun to address a number of the report's findings. In addition, the Assistant High Commissioner will be consulting with concerned staff of the Senior Management Committee to determine how follow-up can best proceed in order to strengthen this important area of activity.

VIII. EVALUATIONS IN PROGRESS

34. At the close of the current reporting period, a major independent evaluation of UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response to the Kosovo crisis was getting underway, as well as an evaluation of UNHCR's efforts to strengthen national NGOs and an evaluation of UNHCR's non-staff training activities.

35. UNHCR's new emphasis on joint evaluations and evaluation transparency are expected to usher in a new era of evaluation and analysis. These new approaches represent an effort to encourage a more open and progressive style of management throughout the Organization. Moreover, it is felt that they will also lead to change and improvement in UNHCR operations, as well as help foster a culture of learning among staff.